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ABSTRACT

For 2 decades, schools in the United Kingdom and in western economies in general have experienced rapid change. Many schools, however, look less like learning organizations today than they did before the introduction of the Education Reform Act in 1988. This paper reports on an ongoing series of case studies of school improvement that developed high-involvement strategies of middle management. The paper explores why key ideas of the learning organization and high-involvement management are so powerful in the contemporary context of rapid change. The paper identifies various types of learning organizations, proposes an analytical technique for relating styles of organizational learning to the environmental context, and concludes with preliminary findings from three research projects in the area of school improvement and middle-management development. Findings of the case studies indicate that headteachers and middle managers in schools are beginning to be aware of issues about the process of school improvement and the relationships between various factors in organizational learning. The findings suggest a move from the "entrepreneurial" toward the "unlearning" form of organizational learning--a point that represents a position in the "growth" stage of the organizational life cycle. Further research will explore the general utility of the model as a tool for senior and middle managers to determine the style of organizational learning most appropriate to the current context of the school. Seven figures are included. (Contains 34 references.) (LMI)

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RETHINKING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

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RETHINKING SCHOOLS AS LEARNING ORGANISATIONS

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Abstract

This paper reports on an ongoing series of case studies of school improvement through developing high involvement strategies for middle management and thus rethinking schools as learning organisations. The case studies are linked through the writer's doctoral research which explores the iterative relationship between theory and practice so that the outcomes of earlier studies are fed into the research frame of later ones.

For some two decades schools in the UK, and in Western economies generally, have been through a period of very rapid change however, paradoxically, many look less like learning organisations today than they may have before the introduction of the Education Reform Act in 1988. Through an examination of some of the key ideas behind the learning organisation and high involvement management, the paper will explore why these concepts are so powerful in the contemporary context of rapid turbulent change. Various types of learning organisations will be identified and an analytical technique for relating styles of organisational learning to the environmental context will be proposed. The paper concludes with preliminary findings from three research projects in the area of school improvement and middle management development.

The Learning Organisation - the context

It has become a truism that we are in a time where the rate of change is increasing exponentially and that this is symptomatic of being at the "cusp point" in chaos theories of change. To respond successfully to such rapidly changing environments, organisations need to learn at least as quickly as the prevailing rate of change; they also need to understand the underlying context and process of change itself. The paper explores some key ideas in learning organisation thinking, grounding these in the findings from three case studies.

Over the past decade or so a great deal of experience has been developed as to what works in such contexts. For instance "lean and fit" companies, it is argued, respond more rapidly, give greater customer satisfaction and are more likely to prosper. However, the perception of individuals in such organisations may well see such rapid change as creating intolerable levels of stress - the game is no longer the one they thought they were playing and their sense of being "in tune" with their world is disrupted - they become dysfunctional and unable to operate effectively in their organisation. Sociologists would categorise this as being in a state of "anomie" or normlessness; psychologists might interpret it as a disruption of the individual's "mind-set" and, possibly, a type of learning disability. In contrast, others who thrive on the constantly reforming challenges characteristic of the *fin de siecle* period can become "change junkies", unable to settle down to any form of routine and relying on their professional or business instincts to keep them ahead of what they see as the opposition.

Regarding the global context in which all organisations now work, what ***is*** clear is that there is a sea-change occurring in which the conflict between capitalist and communist politico-economic systems which has characterised much of our century is being replaced by a much more entrepreneurial global marketplace where world class organisations can manufacture, trade and sell services across national boundaries. Indeed, through interactive technologies such as the Internet, cable and satellite communications, we are moving into a context where, increasingly, the core unit of production and currency is knowledge itself. We are, thus, experiencing a major

paradigm shift not only in terms of economic systems but also their underpinning values and assumptions. Given such a fundamental national and global transformation - what should be the future role of education, and schools in particular, when knowledge is generated and disseminated across widely varying cultures and value-systems?

Figure 1: THE TRANSFORMATION OF VALUES AND VOCATION - a paradigm shift

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE OLD PARADIGM OF *ECONOMICS*	ASSUMPTIONS OF THE NEW PARADIGM OF *VALUES*
• Promotes consumption at all costs, via planned obsolescence, advertising pressure, creation of artificial "needs"	• Appropriate consumption. Conserving, keeping recycling, quality, craftsmanship, innovation, invention to serve authentic needs
• People to fit jobs. Rigidity. Conformity	• Jobs to fit people. Flexibility. Creativity. Form and flow
• Imposed goals, top-down decision-making. Hierarchy, bureaucracy	• Autonomy encouraged. Self-actualisation. Worker participation, democratisation. Shared goals, consensus
• Fragmentation, compartmentalisation in work and roles. Emphasis on specialised tasks. Sharply defined job descriptions	• Cross-fertilisation by specialists seeing wider relevance of their field of expertise. Choice and change in job roles encouraged.
• Identification with job, organisation, profession	• Identity transcends job description
• Clockwork model of economy, based on Newtonian physics	• Recognition of uncertainty in economics
• Aggression, competition. "Business is business".	• Cupertino. Human values transcend "winning".
• Work and play separate. Work as means to an end.	• Blurring of work and play. Work rewarding in itself.
• Manipulation and dominance of nature	• Cupertino with nature; Taoist, organic view of work and wealth.
• Struggle for stability, station, security.	• Sense of change, becoming. Willingness to risk. Entrepreneurial attitude.
• Quantitative: quotas, status symbols, level of income, profits, "raises", Gross National Product, tangible assets.	• Qualitative as well as quantitative. Sense of achievement, mutual effort for mutual enrichment. Values intangible assets (creativity, fulfilment) as well as tangible.
• Strictly economic motives, material values. Progress judged by product, content.	• Spiritual values transcend material gain; material sufficiency. Process as important as product. Context of work as important as content - not just what you do but *how* you do it.
• polarised: labour versus management, consumer versus manufacturer, etc.	• Transcends polarities. Shared goals, values.
• Short-sighted: exploitation of limited resources.	• Ecologically sensitive to ultimate costs. Stewardship.
• "Rational", trusting only data.	• Rational and intuitive. Data, logic augmented by hunches, feelings, insights, non-linear (holistic) sense of pattern.
• Emphasis on short-term solutions.	• Recognition that long-range efficiency must take into account harmonious work environment, employee health, customer relations.
• Centralised operations.	• Decentralised operations wherever possible. Human scale.
• Runaway, unbridled technology. Subservience to technology.	• Appropriate technology. Technology as a tool, not tyrant.
• Allopathic treatment of "symptoms" in economy.	• Attempt to understand the whole, locate deep underlying causes of disharmony, disequilibrium. Preventive "medicine", anticipation of dislocations, scarcities.

Adapted from: Marilyn Ferguson (1993) "The Transformation of values and vocation" in Ray M & Rinzler A The New Paradigm in Business: emerging strategies for leadership and organisational change, New York: Tarcher/Putnam pp:32-34

Whilst it is important for a sense of vision and direction to identify such a paradigm shift as a useful way of enhancing thinking about the range of possibilities which might form our working context in the years to come, it does not, in itself, ensure that we will possess the techniques and understandings for actually living, surviving and succeeding in an unknowable future. What needs to happen is a better societal and individual understanding of ***relationships*** such as those between the change process, styles of learning, organisational development and the ongoing life cycles and paradigms of both contemporary culture and unfolding history. Marilyn Ferguson (1993) has encapsulated the key features in the changing paradigm for business (see Fig. 1) and it illustrates the challenge facing schools in the reconceptualisation of the business of education from the factory model still embedded in many schools (Stoll and Fink 1996) to a more responsive "learning community" approach advocated by Nixon et. al. (1996) in which it is certain that individuals' (and organisations') ultimate success depends on their ability to learn at least as fast as the prevailing rate of change. Those who are more successful will be characterised by their skill in learning faster than the rate of change and in their ability to buck the tide of history by getting, and staying, ahead of the game. The following sections outline some of the key concepts in re-aligning learning for an uncertain future.

Educational and Management Megatrends

The skill of being able to identify a key trend in the tide of history **as it develops** is patently demonstrated in the output of the "gurus" of organisational and development thinking. Such worthies have been able to encapsulate complex analyses and concepts into simple, readily understood models. Examples are Peters and Waterman (1982 - excellence), Hammer and Champy (1993 - reengineering), Morgan (1986 - creative organisational thinking), Deming and Juran (1979 - quality), Bennis and Nanus (1985 - leadership), Belbin (1981 - teams) Mintzberg (1994 - strategic planning) - not forgetting Handy (1994 - most things!). Each of these has taken an aspect of organisational behaviour and constructed an elegant framework around it which has fundamentally changed the way we view organisational development.

We also see such an approach in education with such notables as Fullan (1982 - change), Caldwell and Spinks (1988 - restructuring/site based management), Hargreaves (1991 - development planning), Hopkins (1994 - school improvement) Reynolds (1992 - school effectiveness) not to mention the influence, in the UK, of the heads of the major quasi-autonomous non-governmental organisations (QUANGOs): Chris Woodhead (Office for Standards in Education - OFSTED), Nick Tate (Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority - SCAA) and Anthea Millet (Teacher Training Agency - TTA). National curriculum, assessment, appraisal, local self management, pupil standards, raising achievement, baseline assessment, National Standards for teacher competency (Newly Qualified Teachers, National Professional Qualification for Subject Leaders, National Professional Qualification for Headship, Headteacher Leadership and Management Programme and, to come in 1997, Expert Classroom Teacher - TTA 1996) all form aspects of the "new model army" of teaching in England and Wales.

So what is the highest common factor which might bring together such developments for teachers, pupils and their communities? Returning to the notion of success hinging on the ability to learn in times of rapid change, commercial concerns have seized upon the concept of the Learning Organisation as one response to the need for rapid organisational development. Ironically, just as the focus changes in industry away from narrow issues of control to the wider

field of learning, in education it has swung in the reverse direction - towards control (inspection), teaching (professional standards), bureaucracy/efficiency (Local Management of Schools/Grant Maintained Schools) and testing (National Curriculum). Yet again we are facing the prospect of the pendulum swinging one way in the world outside education and the opposite way within the system. Now is the time to wrest learning back for the profession - particularly headteachers and their senior and middle management - in other words: re-invent schools as truly learning organisations and reengineer their structures and processes for life long learning

Approaches to Modelling Learning

The idea of organisational learning has evolved over at least half a century stemming from the work of Lewin (1946) on experiential learning. However, learning theory itself, of course, goes back a great deal further than this though, strangely, the philosophical, psychological, sociological and organisational strands have tended to remain somewhat discrete: To illustrate this, the philosophical and psychological models of learning could be represented thus:

PHILOSOPHY	***PSYCHOLOGY***
Neo-classical/ humanist	Behaviourist
Vocational	Cognitive
Liberal-meritocratic	Problem-solving
Liberal progressive	Gestalt
Socially critical	Experiential
Religious	Developmental
Pragmatic	Meta-cognition
	Work-based

Figure 2: Models of Learning

As in the above example (Fig. 2), sociological notions of learning reflect the various paradigms in the parent social sciences, from the functional-structuralist perspective which views learning as a socialisation process where individuals are inculcated with the prevailing societal norms of behaviour and ways of thinking, through the symbolic interactionist view that thinking and learning arise from mental debates between the self and significant/generalised others, to phenomenological stances which seek to uncover the hidden rules of behaviour through "bracketing the world outside" - i.e. suspending belief in the world in order to expose the hidden rules of behaviour. In each case, learning is essentially a social activity, often counter-illustrated by tales of feral children (i.e. those supposedly brought up in the wild by animals) who have been unable to learn because of their separation from society.

It has been argued that organisations as such do not (or, indeed cannot) learn - it is the individuals inside the organisation who do the learning. However, if learning is seen as a social activity, then the individual will experience learning as part of a group, indeed a symbolic-interactionist approach would maintain that learning itself comes out of the interplay of the individual and unique utterances of the "self" and the internal mental response to this in terms of significant and generalised others - a dialogue between the "I" and my judgement of the "me" from the standpoint of society. Thus the work group can be conceived of as a learning organisation as it

forms the context through which I both acquire and influence cultural norms. As learning is a social activity, and organisations are the location for most of us most of the time, then all organisations must be learning in some way all of the time. It may well be that the learning is inappropriate, dysfunctional or deviant but, nevertheless, it is taking place. One of the benefits of changes with which teachers have had to cope in the past two decades has been a more eclectic and situational approach to teaching and learning styles - making the activity suit the context and participants. Such a re-focusing on learning as a response to rapid change means the teaching profession needs to figure much more prominently and proactively than hitherto in the regeneration of society instead of reacting mechanistically to reductionist views which seek to identify and then prescribe curriculum content and methodology and focus on narrow performance indicators as measures of success - in short re-think the learning process itself.

Characteristics of the Learning Organisation

In the organisational learning field, there are two main strands - the "learning styles" approach which is rooted in the psychology of management development (Honey and Mumford 1986), used as both a diagnostic and development tool, and the "learning organisation" approach (Senge 1990) which stems from systems thinking. In the former case, Mumford, building on the work of Kolb (1984) and Lewin (1946) on the concept of the learning cycle, developed a typology of four learning styles (activist, reflector, theorist, pragmatist) each of which represents a point on a cycle of learning approaches. Honey and Mumford maintain that each of us has a preference for working in one of these modes more than the others. Knowing your preferred learning style allows you to determine how best you learn individually but it also identifies other possible styles which you need to develop more fully so that you can support others in their own learning through a knowledge of *their* preferred learning styles. There is also evidence that professions and vocations have group preferences and the Learning Styles inventory list norms for a number of these. Within a particular professional group there can be a shift in overall preference for a certain learning style in response to changing environmental contexts over time (Kelly 1995) - this indicates that there is, in practice, group learning taking place in the professional community, though admittedly probably unconsciously and pragmatically.

This acceptance of the power of individual and group learning in the development of effective organisations is also shown in the growing number of courses and management development texts which are based at least partly on a model for self-development (Hall et al 1996, Quinn et al 1996, Whetten et al 1994,). A focus on learning at the individual level and at the group level through team building, for example, is not, however, a sufficient condition for characterising the whole organisation as a learning organisation.

From work that has been done over the past two decades, various writers (particularly Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell 1987) have summarised what the range of conditions for learning organisations are and perhaps the simplest and most applicable summary of these is provided by Garratt:

A perception of learning as a cyclical process
An acceptance of the different roles of policy, strategy and operations within the organisation
A free flow of authentic information
The ability to value people as the key asset for organisational learning

> The ability to reframe information at the strategic level: first and second order change.
> [Garratt 1990: 78-79]

Having established what the key conditions are, Holly moves beyond categorising the key features and identifies, from a number of sources in the field, what learning organisations actually **do** . This is potentially a more powerful way of looking at the concept as it brings together both the types of action that need to be undertaken and illustrates the range of approaches as follows:

Learning Organisations look to the future by looking at their present

Learning Organisations institutionalise reflection-in-action

Learning Organisations treat planning [and evaluation] as learning

Learning Organisations pace their learning and their development

Learning Organisations attend to the new 'disciplines'

Learning Organisations learn from themselves

Learning Organisations are life-long learners

[Holly 1994:132-136]

to both of these lists I would add that

Learning Organisations use meta-learning, that is they learn *how* to learn.

In the USA work on learning organisations arose from systems thinking, which itself originates from an engineering/technology background. Although there is a tendency for such approaches to resemble wiring diagrams and plumbing schematics, at least this is attempting to recognise organisational development (and learning) as an ongoing process rather than just a list of attributes and, as such, avoids the worst effects of reductionism through fragmentation. This systemic approach is typified by Senge's (1990) model of the five disciplines of a learning organisation: personal mastery, shared vision, mental models, team learning and, the "fifth discipline", systems thinking. The implication is that a truly "learning organisation" needs to possess all of these to a high degree.

However, in all of these conceptualisations of the learning organisation, there is still the implication that there is only one sort of learning organisation and you are either there because these characteristics typify your organisation or you are "working towards" being a learning organisation. More recently, having established a wide range of learning style norms from working in management development over many years, Mumford (1994) is beginning to consider whether groups and whole organisations have identifiable learning styles which relate to those of the preferred learning styles of individuals. Indeed, just as managers and leaders need to work through all these management styles in response to their changing environment, organisations may move through the cycle, using different styles depending upon the stage of development at the time or position in the organisational life cycle - of which more below. We thus have the possibility of at least four types of learning organisations, paralleling the four individual learning styles:

activist organisations

reflecting organisations,

theorist organisations

pragmatic organisations

Swieringa and Wierdsma (1992), in their formulation, also identify four types of learning organisations: building on Argyris and Schon's (1974) notions of single and double loop learning

(single loop learning can be equated to organisational surface learning or incremental adjustments and double or triple loop learning to organisational deep learning or fundamental re-thinking) to identify four type of learning organisations:

Prescriptive organisations change slowly through the application of tried and tested rules and bureaucratic procedures; thinking and learning goes on away from the day-to-day process of production/service by "staff" (head office) departments for example personnel, finance, marketing and research and development.

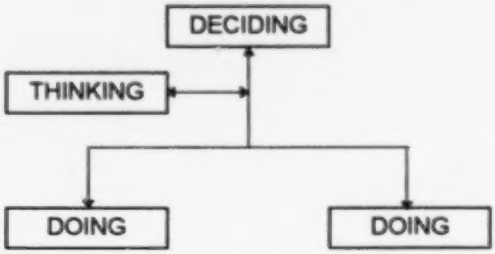

Figure 4: Thinking and Learning in Prescriptive Organisations

Entrepreneurial organisations cope with rapidly changing environments by intuitive reaction - they don't really have time to think or learn, individually or organisationally!

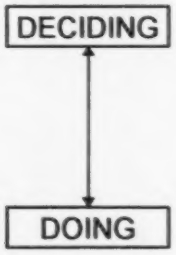

Figure 5: Thinking and Learning in Entrepreneurial Organisations

Unlearning organisations are aware that a surface approach through minor adjustments is unlikely to satisfy future contexts and therefore they engage in whole-organisation reviews and audits to prepare themselves for a paradigm shift.

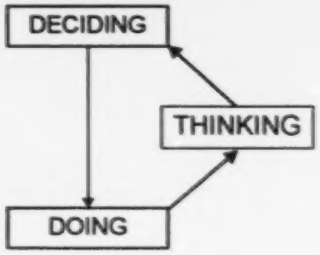

Figure 6: Thinking and Learning in Unlearning Organisations

Finally, learning organisations accomplish the paradigm shift but they also acquire the capacity for going through the whole process again, setting up long range environmental scanning facilities to monitor when a future "cusp point" might be approaching requiring further re-thinking and fundamental re-engineering.

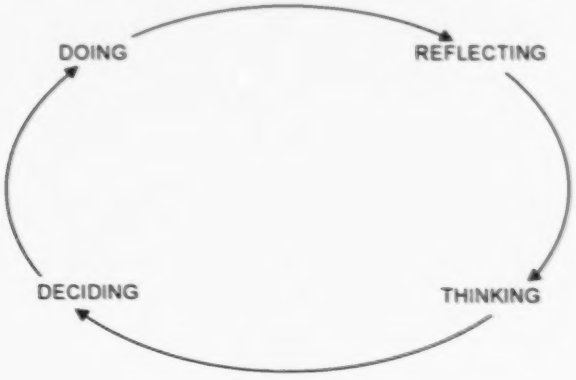

Figure 7: Thinking and Learning in Learning Organisations

In each case they describe a different approach to learning as being the distinguishing feature which determines the category into which the organisation fits best. This recognises that all organisations learn, just as all individuals learn, the issue is how effective is their learning and how closely does it match the stage in the cycle of development and the needs of the change context in which the organisation finds itself?

The Organisational Life Cycle and High Involvement Management

A characteristic of the new paradigm of thinking is a focus on processes and relationships, both in terms of human relationships and systems thinking, rather than structures. It is also becoming clear that organisations develop through various stages in a cycle of growth and decline. Handy's (1994) concept of the "sigmoid curve" is an example of how an organisation can be proactive in

using this notion to re-think its position and avoid stagnation and decline.

The concept of life cycle is an interesting one in this context. It has been most thoroughly developed, perhaps, in the field of strategic planning and marketing (Johnson and Scholes 1993) where it is used both to characterise the stage of development of the whole organisation (typically: embryonic, growth, maturity, decline) and also in analysing the balance of the product range in order to ensure new products are being developed and mature products maintained or possibly phased out. The life cycle concept is developed further in the marketing field where types (and amounts) of customers are categorised depending on which particular stage in the product life cycle they identify with and the percentage of the market represented (innovators 2.5%, early adopters 13.5%, early majority 34%, late majority 34%, laggards 16%). The model is then used to review the company's spread of products to ensure they are designed to appeal to a particular segments of the market.

Applied to learning organisation thinking it gives another dimension to the type of learning that might be appropriate at each stage in the life cycle - if we take the style of organisational learning (for argument's sake I have used Swieringa and Wierdsma's typology) as one axis and the life cycle stage as the other we can develop a framework onto which we can plot the organisation under review:

LIFE CYCLE STAGE: STYLE OF LEARNING	Embryonic	Growth	Shakeout	Maturity	Decline
Entrepreneurial					
Prescriptive					
Unlearning					
Learning					

Figure 3: Organisational Learning Styles and the Life Cycle - a framework for analysis

This is, however, only the first stage of the analysis. In order to develop a tool for judging the appropriateness of the learning style to the stage of development of the organisation, we have to consider a further factor - that of the movement of the task of leadership and management downwards in the delayered "flatarchies" characteristic of modern market-responsive organisations. Lawler (1992) refers to this as "high involvement management" i.e. most of the workforce is now involved in management in some shape or form.

High Involvement Management

In education, it can be argued, teachers have always been highly involved in management of the classroom and their part of the curriculum, however, as site-based management becomes the norm and Governing Bodies and Senior Management Teams become more confident in their knowledge and skills, leadership and management at all levels now encompasses a much wider brief. This can be seen in the draft NPQSL where skills are required in managing teaching, learning and the curriculum; monitoring, evaluating and improving; people and relationships; managing resources and accountability (TTA 1996).

Lawler's discussion of high involvement management describes not only ***how*** the different elements in the organisation combine to create high involvement but also ***why*** such a formulation brings success in the marketplace. He considers the relationship between elements of the organisation as functions in an equation - this can be simplified as the "multiplier effect". Briefly, this means that the elements and aspects which align act as multipliers in the whole equation, rather than just being summed. The effect of this is to show that, if any one element or aspect is zero then the whole equation resolves as zero. Lawler's concern is with high involvement management in flat organisational structures and for him the equation works out thus:

Involvement = Information x Knowledge x Power x Rewards

However, the quantum leap in thinking is in his account of ***how*** the various elements of management combine together and relate to these sources of competitive advantage. The multiplier effect is one of these concepts, the others are those of ***fit*** and ***congruence***. As Lawler puts it : " ... no one part of an organisation can be evaluated without knowing its role in the whole system" (1992:52). The notion of congruence progresses beyond the appreciation of which particular aspects of an organisation are the ones to "get right", to an understanding of ***how*** the parts interact: "congruence exists when individuals at all levels in an organisation are rewarded based upon how effectively they exercise the power that is associated with their position and they have the information and knowledge to exercise their power effectively" (1992:57). Unlike many other writers, however, Lawler does not prescribe one "ideal" set of these relationships but recognises that in some contexts an hierarchical top-down approach is appropriate whereas in others a bottom-up or high involvement approach is more effective. These concepts have been developed through an examination of strategies which are used in organisations to achieve competitive advantage. Although largely arising from the business context, his ideas have powerful implications for schools and colleges in the new education marketplace.

So we have the beginnings of a framework which can be used to look at the type of learning going on in organisations and relate this to models of learning and stages in the life cycle of the organisation. We also have a powerful mechanism for looking at the way in which elements of learning might fit together to enhance synergy and also, incidentally, a way of linking personal growth to team and organisational learning. The elements of this framework have been generated through the parallel activities of an ongoing literature review and the analysis of practice through the series of case studies. The task is now to use the framework to revisit the case studies and begin to determine under what conditions a fundamental reengineering and re-thinking approach might be required as against a more evolutionary incremental one.

Implications for Schools: preliminary evidence from Case Studies:

The following brief accounts describe three projects which are part of an ongoing series in the writer's doctoral research through which some of the above thinking has been developed. The first study has been concluded and the findings and conceptual insights developed have been fed into the research design of the following two studies which are currently in progress. The methodology is thus action oriented and the model discussed above has resulted from the interplay between the emerging understandings of an analysis of practice and a conceptual fusion of key ideas in the literature.

MEDALS (Management Education through Distance Action Learning with Support) - this case study involves a middle management development programme which was initiated by Hereford and Worcester LEA in response to the work of a steering group of headteachers and LEA inspectorate staff. The project consisted of a cascade model where two members of staff from a range of 16 volunteer schools went through a year's periodic training and development programme using the Management Self-development materials from the Bristol NDCEMP, Hall et al 1996). The participants then ran a similar course in their own schools for a further year. Nine of the schools agreed to take part in a collaborative evaluation carried out by Worcester College of Higher Education. The evaluation was unique in that the participants were enrolled on the WCHE advanced modular MA scheme and followed an interactive programme of training in evaluation and action research whereupon they each carried out a small scale evaluation in their own schools, reporting their outcomes (both in process and findings terms) to the project team who collated them into a meta-evaluation of the whole programme.

The main outcomes of this were:

the individuals had the opportunity for growth through reflection

the process of using each other as critical friends/learning partners was a valuable professional technique

inter-school support was important

a better understanding of management was achieved

individuals gained specific individual skills (which varied according to the individual)

Some of the tensions which arose were:

individual learning as against collaborative learning

organisational needs as against professional needs

the role of the management developer as a change agent in the school

the newness and uncertainty of the model of supported distance learning

the value of the concept of collaborative evaluation in organisational and individual development

Additionally there was a differential response to the new skills of the school project team in the nine schools:

three schools were delighted by the increased awareness of whole school issues and strategic thinking of the school middle managers on the team and a great deal of synergy was generated

in a further three schools a significant tension arose between the senior managers and the newly up-skilled project team

in the middle were a group of schools where there were no significant tensions but the project team and the facilitators failed to achieve much synergy

The interpretation here is that, where headteachers were aware of the power of such a middle management programme to challenge and transcend top-down styles and had planned to adopt a more two-way style, they were very happy with the raised level of thinking and action of their project team. Indeed, these schools had made concrete plans to build on and develop the team to tackle a wider range of management and whole school issues. On the other hand, where headteachers saw the programme as merely improving the technical skills of the middle managers, they felt threatened by the new strategic power of this team and did not fully capitalise on the team's potential - their schools were unable to become fully learning organisations.

School Based Management Development through NVQ : this case study is situated in a Grant Maintained comprehensive school in the county town of a large rural county in England. The school contacted the LEA to set up a middle and senior management development programme using the Royal Society of Arts management development scheme. This is based on the Management Charter Initiative's competency framework and is approved for NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) Level Four (middle management) and Level Five (senior management). The programme agreed covers an eighteen month period during which LEA staff will deliver nine taught units in twilight and training day times approximately once each half term. The topics are:

quality

managing change

managing recruitment

team building

managing performance

managing relationships

managing information

managing decision making

Between the sessions support is given for each candidate to prepare and submit a portfolio of evidence covering the required competencies for the unit of work. Five senior managers are using the course to attain level five qualification and ten middle managers are following level four. Additionally, an external evaluation has been contracted from the University sector and this involves observation of some of the teaching units, the portfolio development sessions, key meetings of the school management group and the LEA providers and assessors. An analysis of the paperwork will be carried out and each candidate and a sample of providers

will be interviewed. It is believed this is the first school in the country to embark on this particular course of accreditation with both the senior and middle management.

At the time of writing much of the analysis has still to be undertaken, however, it can be said at this stage that the school and the providers are on a steep learning curve which has generated some significant tensions as well as positive benefits for the participants. These might be summarised as:

Tensions

resistance from some candidates to the amount of work involved in preparing the portfolio and the "compulsory" nature of the programme

unsureness from the providers about the specifics of portfolio assessment

a general lack of clarity about the applicability of this model to teaching and schools

differences of perception between the senior and middle management groups on the programme

Benefits

close involvement of candidates, providers and the LEA in school based management development

a sense of recognition of the value of the candidates as professional managers through participation in the programme

an ethos of optimism in school wide development which has been reinforced by the consultation documents from the TTA on NPQSL

Using the framework for analysis, this school could be located in the "mature" stage of its current life cycle and be categorised as an "unlearning" organisation, It has been operating successfully as a GM school with strong leadership from the headteacher and is now going through a rethinking stage to prepare itself for the next phase of development.

An LEA GEST Programme for School Improvement: this study concerns one rural LEA's initiative in supporting small rural schools (of less than 60 pupils) by the allocation of £1000 to each school and the requirement to follow a systematic programme of development planning, target setting monitoring and review supported by advisory help and visits. The programme results from a successful bid to the DfEE for funding under the School Improvement special priority area and involves 42 schools across the county and their pastoral advisers. The initiative is managed by a steering group of advisers and seconded headteachers and a project director with the support of a senior adviser. Each school had to submit a detailed, costed and timed plan for expenditure on the programme related to the school's overall development plan and identifying success indicators for each aspect of their programme. Additionally all the schools were encouraged to take part in the LEAs PIPS programme which collates pupil performance data from schools and provides comparative tables on both a school by school and individual pupil basis.

The programme is required to arrange an external evaluation and this is being carried out by the local University. It consists of a content analysis of each school's plans, observation of steering group meetings, a sample of six school progress meetings and participation in the

evaluation conference. The steering group members will be interviewed and a sample of telephone interviews with headteachers will be undertaken, as will a content analysis of the advisers report sheets from the school-based progress meetings.

At the time of writing, the main period of data collection has been achieved and the evaluation is proceeding to the analysis stage. The preliminary findings indicate that the key issues emerging are:

the focus on specific realisable targets has enable a synergy of effort to be developed bringing together advisory staff, teachers, governors, parents and pupils

the progress meetings are generally seen as helpful for headteachers of small schools who often do not have the opportunity to talk to peers about issues of school improvement

the importance of the provision of additional resources which have been used in variety of ways, ranging from additional equipment and books for pupils to time for staff to meet and plan

schools have valued the support from the Project Centre in terms of administrative and professional help in the delivery of the programme's objectives

the more successful schools have chosen specific and deliverable targets from their development plans and struck a balance between additional pupil resources and releasing teachers from class contact for planning time

less successful schools have tended to choose targets which are not part of their development plans and spent the resources largely on pupil materials

in most cases headteachers are not yet able to articulate an increased understanding of the process of evaluation and its link to improvement

NB: "success" in this context is seen as achievement of the targets agreed with the LEA both in terms of the *outcome* of a specific performance indicator (e.g. increase in reading ability of the targeted group of children) and in terms of the use and understanding of the *process* of target setting, implementation, monitoring and review. This judgement was agreed in a semi-formal review meeting at each school attended by advisory staff from the LEA, the project steering group, the headteacher and a governor.

Using the framework, most of the schools can be seen to be in the "youth" stage of development but they vary in terms of their style of organisation learning. At this stage of data analysis the precise distribution is yet to be established but the most successful would seem to be operating an "unlearning" style, using the impetus from the LEA project to rethink their approach to change.

Conclusion

Preliminary evidence from these case studies indicates that headteachers and middle managers in schools are beginning to be aware of issues of the process of school improvement and the relationships between various factors in organisational learning. At this stage this would appear to indicate a move from the "entrepreneurial" towards the "unlearning" form of organisational learning and a point which represents a position in the "growth" stage of the organisational life cycle. Further research, both by revisiting earlier case studies and through a more rigorous application of the framework to later studies, will reveal the general utility of the model as a tool

for senior and middle managers and leaders to determine the style of organisational learning most appropriate to the current context of the school.

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